



**TESTIMONY OF**

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REGIONAL PLAN ASSOCIATION**

**ON BEHALF OF**

**THE BUSINESS ALLIANCE FOR NORTHEAST MOBILITY**

**REGARDING**

**THE FUTURE OF HIGH-SPEED RAIL IN THE NORTHEAST CORRIDOR**

**BEFORE THE**

**COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

January 27, 2011  
Field Hearing on

*HIGH-SPEED RAIL IN THE NORTHEAST CORRIDOR*

Chairman Mica and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the future of high-speed rail in the Northeast Corridor. I am speaking on behalf of the Business Alliance for Northeast Mobility, a coalition of over 30 leading business and civic groups from Boston to Washington, DC, which came together in 2006 to support federal appropriations for making improvements to Amtrak's Northeast Corridor because of its indispensable role in the Northeast Megaregion's economy. I am here to inform the Committee of the Business Alliance's strong support for bringing the Northeast Corridor to a state of good repair and exploring dedicated high-speed rail service in the corridor in order to boost economic growth in the region.

The Northeast Corridor moves approximately three-quarters of a million people per day to their jobs or among the major downtown business hubs of the Northeast Megaregion. These movements are critical to the Northeast's \$2.6 trillion economy, which accounts for roughly one-fifth of the U.S. GDP. Imagine if 750,000 additional daily passengers were suddenly added to Interstate-95 and the Northeast's major airports (already the most congested in the nation). Our transportation networks would come to a standstill, as they regularly do already, because of their inadequate capacity and failure to meet existing demand.

In 2008, the Business Alliance strongly supported the passage of PRIIA, the Passenger Rail Investment Improvement Act, which provided a dependable rail authorization for Amtrak and created the High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program, through which high-speed rail funding was appropriated in the stimulus bill and the Fiscal Year 2010 budget.

Unfortunately, we have only begun to chip away at the \$8.7 billion backlog in deferred maintenance that has accumulated on the Corridor, due to inadequate federal funding. As a coalition, our top priority has been to secure funding to bring the Corridor to a state of good repair, which we see as a federal responsibility, stemming from the federal government's creation of Amtrak and the direct impact of the Northeast Corridor on the economy of twelve states and the nation's global economic competitiveness.

While the immediate and urgent challenge is to maintain the Corridor's existing rail infrastructure, the Alliance is also looking ahead to the improvements needed to accommodate the growth of the Northeast economy. Specifically, we support building two new dedicated high-speed rail tracks along the length of the Northeast Corridor to significantly reduce trip times and substantially increase capacity, convenience and reliability, while dramatically enhancing the global competitiveness of the Northeast.

The recent Amtrak and Penn Design Visions for dedicated high-speed rail in the Northeast Corridor have shown the feasibility of building world class high-speed rail here, slashing trip times to less than two hours from New York to Boston and New York to Washington, while providing up to 12 trains per hour. The costs of these improvements are estimated at \$5 billion annually or approximately \$117 billion over the next 30 years.

Upon completion, the Amtrak plan estimates a \$900 million annual operating surplus with revenues from fares, food, and other services outweighing total operation and maintenance costs. It also envisions an interoperable system in which new high-speed lines interconnect at key points with existing Northeast Corridor operations facilitating a comprehensive service plan. Such a plan will enable all communities in the megaregion to have access to the new service and benefit from this public/private investment.

The Northeast Corridor has the population density, concentrations of employment, connections to rail transit networks, and proven demand between city pairs to justify this investment.

For example, in the five largest metropolitan regions along the Northeast Corridor alone, almost 19 million people *work* within 25 miles of a major train station. More than 34 million people in these five regions *live* within 25 miles of a major train station. One-third of the inhabitants of major metropolitan areas in the Northeast are within walking distance of a rail transit station with connecting service to intercity rail stations on the Northeast Corridor. These figures of population and employment density around rail in the Northeast dwarf those of every other megaregion in the nation. Further, as these high-speed lines are built, it will reinforce private sector investment and development in these existing employment nodes, insuring that population and job growth can occur in a way that will reduce our dependency on foreign oil.

But it is critical that we get started in building these plans, while we still have the momentum of a new national commitment to high-speed rail in America. Unfortunately, the mainline Northeast Corridor was largely excluded from major capitol grants awarded in the first two rounds of high-speed rail grants in 2010 because we lacked an up-to-date Environmental Impact Statement for the corridor. A year later, this EIS has not begun.

In December, the Business Alliance sent a letter to Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, asking for his leadership to expedite the corridor-wide EIS process and we met recently with his staff to discuss the details. We are anxiously awaiting the start of the EIS process, which should consider all of the major proposals for meeting the capacity and travel needs on the Corridor for future generations – including the Northeast Corridor Master Plan completed through the cooperation of twelve states and the District of Columbia in 2010, Amtrak's Next Generation Vision, and the PennDesign plan.

Once scoped, we ask for the help of the Committee in looking into ways that the Northeast Corridor EIS process can be tiered and shortened so we do not waste another two or more years waiting for its completion to start construction.

Finally, we do believe the private sector has an important role to play beyond the traditional engineering and construction contracts placed by public agencies in delivering large capital projects such as East Side Access bringing Long Island Rail Road commuter service to this location where we meet today, and we would like to meet with you, Mr. Chair, and the Committee members, to discuss specific proposals for public private partnerships in the Northeast Corridor.

However, the necessary precursor to private investment and implementation is agreement on the vision. And for this, we ask you for your leadership. We ask for your support of a bold vision for the Northeast Corridor. And we ask for you to work with the Northeast states and Amtrak and the business community to agree on a practical strategy for accommodating the 21st century transportation needs of the Northeast and national economy.

## **LIST OF BUSINESS ALLIANCE FOR NORTHEAST MOBILITY MEMBERS**

1000 Friends of Connecticut  
A Better City  
AECOM  
American Institute of Architects, New York Chapter  
The Boston Foundation  
The Business Council of Fairfield County  
The Business Council of New York State  
The BWI Business Partnership, Inc.  
Capitol Region Council of Governments  
Centerstate CEO  
Central Connecticut Regional Planning Agency  
Central Maryland Transportation Alliance  
Central Philadelphia Development Corporation  
Central Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce  
CEO Council for Growth/Greater Philadelphia  
Chamber of Commerce  
Chesapeake Crescent Initiative  
Connecticut Economic Resources Center (CERC)  
Connecticut Technology Council  
Delaware State Chamber of Commerce  
General Contractors Association of New York  
Greater Baltimore Committee  
Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce  
Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce  
Greater Washington Board of Trade  
Mercer Regional Chamber of Commerce  
Metro Hartford Alliance  
Middlesex County Regional Chamber of Commerce  
New Castle County Chamber of Commerce  
New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce  
Newark Regional Business Partnership  
Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau  
Pioneer Valley Planning Commission  
Providence-Warwick Convention and Visitors Bureau  
Regional Plan Association  
Select Greater Philadelphia  
Stamford Urban Redevelopment Commission  
Staten Island Chamber of Commerce  
TranSystems  
Washington, D.C. Convention & Tourism Corporation